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ABSTRACT

A recently completed study of staff development provides the basis for an overview of the staff development process as observed in 16 districts and a description of the roles central office administrators usually assume. The staff development process includes needs assessment and program planning, delivery, and evaluation. While the vast majority of staff development programs are directed to teachers, they are sometimes also provided for administrators, principals, counselors, or community members. Administrators generally adopt the role of decisionmaker, trainer, or facilitator. The roles are not mutually exclusive, and some administrators fill all three. There is a fourth role that administrators could assume--that of participant. Lack of direct participation by central office administrators perpetuates conditions detrimental to effective staff development: it encourages administrators to view staff development as remediation, and it allows administrators to absolve themselves of responsibility for what goes on in the classroom. (Author/WD)

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"THE ROLE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT"

Nicki King

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Introduction

The importance of central office administrators in the process of staff development has been overlooked. Research that examines the process of staff development at the school level and evaluations that attempt to measure the effectiveness of various federal programs that provide staff development have not addressed how the central office administration can help or hinder staff development programs.

The role of central office administration in staff development is important for two reasons. First, and most obvious, is that administrators implement staff development policies and programs set by the school board, the superintendent, and federal and state agencies. The school board or other policymaking groups may establish guidelines for programs, but local administrators must establish procedures to help them operate. Second, administrators are usually opinion leaders in the district, and they are often the key decisionmakers in the promotion of other staff members. A central administration that views staff development as important may lead to an increased attendance at staff development meetings by staff members who would like to advance in the system. The reverse is also true. If the central administration does not value staff development, attendance in staff development sessions may be very low, or staff participation may be perfunctory.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the staff development process as observed in the 16 districts visited during a recently completed study of staff development. Then it will describe and critique

the three roles central office administrators most commonly assumed in the staff development process: *decisionmaker*, *trainer* and *facilitator*. Finally, the paper will propose a fourth role which administrators rarely assumed: *participant*.

The observations reported here are drawn from a study of staff development sponsored by the National Institute of Education's Desegregation Studies Team. Personal interviews were conducted in 16 desegregated school districts with active staff development programs. The study examined all staff development programs in the school districts, both prior to and since desegregation. Seventy-five central office administrators were interviewed during the course of the study, along with 225 teachers, 75 principals, 75 trainers, and a number of community members, school board members, and teachers' union leadership. The districts represented non-Southern states that had desegregated between 1970 and 1978. They ranged from 6,000 to 65,000 students, with a variety of ethnic compositions. Half of the districts had desegregated as the result of a court order.

The Staff Development Process--An Overview

The process of staff development can be more easily understood by delineating the activities that contribute to it. These activities include:

- *Needs Assessment*
- *Program Planning*
- *Program Delivery*
- *Program Evaluation*

Needs Assessment is the precursor to providing staff development. This activity consists of attempts to identify staff needs, measure their magnitude, and decide how they can best be met. In many cases, staff needs cannot be met by staff development programs. The needs assessment should serve to distinguish those needs that can be solved or improved by inservice from those that cannot. Ideally, needs assessment involves input from all levels of district staff and community members. Needs assessment can either be formal or informal. Formal needs assessment is a structured process that is well understood by all levels of district staff and can be repeated on an annual or biannual basis. Informal needs assessment is relatively unstructured, and only one or two district staff members are likely to be able to describe it. Typically, there are no plans to repeat informal needs assessment on a regular basis.

Program Planning takes place after the staff development needs have been identified. This activity includes big decisions about the content of staff development programs, their structure, the cost of the programs and who the trainers will be. Smaller decisions about program timing and logistics are also part of planning, but they tend to be secondary concerns which are firmed up after the structure and content of the program are set. One of the most important results of the program planning activity should be the delineation of objectives that a particular staff development program is designed to meet. The objectives should be operational and measurable, and should be derived from the needs identified during the needs assessment.

Program Delivery is the third activity in the staff development process. In consists of implementing the plans that were made during

the earlier phases. Most districts devoted the majority of their staff development resources to the actual delivery of programs. The programs themselves took many forms, from one-day workshops to year-long courses with weekly meetings. The trainers involved in the programs were sometimes special outside consultants, but in over eighty percent of the 142 programs encountered, district employees acted as trainers. Staff development programs were sometimes provided for administrators, counselors, principals, teachers, or community members, but the vast majority of the programs were directed to teachers.

Program Evaluation is the final activity in the staff development process. Ideally, the results of the evaluation should be used as input for the next Needs Assessment. Program evaluations can be of two types: First, the questionnaire-based evaluation that is conducted at the final session of the staff development program. This evaluation provides a useful critique of the structure and logistics of the program, but it is not very useful for determining if the programs have met their objectives. The second type of evaluation is performance-based, and it may take place long after the conclusion of the program. This evaluation may be based on observation of staff behavior, follow-up interview, or measurement of progress toward the achievement of some previously identified objective. This type of evaluation is not very useful for providing feedback on the logistics or structure of the programs, because those impressions tend to fade over time, but it is vital for determining how effective a particular program was in meeting the needs identified.

The Role of Administrators in the Staff Development Process

The interview materials from the 16 school districts visited identified three general roles administrators assume in the staff development process. These roles are the *decisionmaker*, the *trainer*, and the *facilitator*. The roles are not mutually exclusive: depending upon the setting, administrators in a given district may assume one, two or all three of these roles.

When the central administration assumes the role of *decisionmaker* in staff development it takes the responsibility for decisions about the content of staff development programs, determines where and when they will be held, how long the programs will be and who will do the training. Although other actors in the district such as principals, consultants, teachers or support staff may provide input to the decision-making process, central office administrators were the primary decision-makers and organizers of staff development programs.

The role of central administrator as *decisionmaker* did not necessarily cause problems; all but two of the 16 districts visited during the course of the study had central office personnel making some major staff development decisions. This may be a necessary administrative function; teachers and principals must devote most of their time to instruction and school-site administration. If staff development responsibilities were added to those instructional responsibilities, staff development would probably receive little attention. That appeared to be the case in one district where the principals were the sole decisionmakers about staff development activities. In that district, each principal was given a budget for staff development and the freedom to develop his or her own programs. In three of the six

schools in that district, no staff development programs had been conducted for two academic years. In the other three, the amount of staff development and its intensity varied widely with the interest and time commitment of the principal.

In the fourteen districts with some central administrative responsibility for staff development decisionmaking, the degree of control by central administration varied. In 10 out of the 14 districts, administrators controlled all decisions concerning needs assessment and program planning. They received suggestions from teachers, principals and community, but rarely in a structured manner. Furthermore, the program objectives were often unclear, or there was little agreement between administrators, principals, teachers, and community on what objectives *should be*. As a result, the actual decisionmaking structure was not viewed as participative. Furthermore, the fact that there was no structured method for teacher and principal participation in needs assessment and program planning often resulted in programs that were viewed as less effective than programs in districts where there were such structured methods.

Districts with more structured methods for teacher and principal participation in needs assessment and program planning typically had formal needs assessments to help determine staff members inservice requirements. These "formal" needs assessments were done in a variety of ways. Sometimes, they were surveys of teachers and principals, while at other times they were school-based meetings to identify needs and problems. At other times, personal interviews with staff members were conducted by a district-wide staff development committee. These formal needs assessments were often accompanied by wide participation in

decisionmaking by teachers, students, principals and community members. Sometimes this participation took the form of a staff development committee chaired by an administrator, while in others there was a loose advisory structure of teachers, principals, and community members. In any event, the methods used for needs assessment were understood district-wide and they were somehow standardized so that needs assessments could be repeated.

The administrator as decisionmaker also assumed primary responsibility for evaluating staff development programs and for seeing to it that the result of the evaluations are used in the next cycle of needs assessment and program planning. Most of the districts' staff development resources are devoted to actually delivering the programs, and the administrator assigned to staff development typically has many other responsibilities. The result of these circumstances is that evaluation is likely to be left undone when the district administration assumes primary responsiblity for decisionmaking. More than half of the programs reviewed in those 16 districts received no evaluation at all. Almost all of those that had evaluation used only the last-session questionnaire method of evaluation. Only two districts had begun to use longer-range, behavioral measures to determine the effectiveness of staff development, and to use the results of those evaluations in program planning or needs assessment activities.

Our review of central administration roles in staff development concluded that the role of administrators as primary *decisionmakers* in the staff development process is convenient for assuring that staff development takes place and for maintaining central control of expenditures and quality. Districts that use administrators in this role, however, should take steps to ensure participation of teachers, principals,

and community members in needs identification, program planning and program evaluation activities.

When the central administration assumes the role of *trainer*, administrators undertake most of the training for staff members themselves. In this role, the administration takes all of the responsibility for program delivery. This role is often difficult to maintain.

First, it assumes that all knowledge about the techniques and content needed for staff enhancement is resident at the administrative level. Since central office administrators may have been out of the classroom for many years (or may never have been teachers in the classroom) their credibility in the role of trainer may be limited. Staff members were often skeptical of the "expertise" of trainers who had held only administration jobs for years, particularly when the staff development focused on instructional practices. When staff development was intended to clarify district policies or programs, central office administrators were the most appropriate trainers, and the sessions were generally regarded favorably. Even when the training was about some instructional practice, if the trainer/administrator was regarded as a successful practitioner in the subject area, the training was generally regarded as effective.

Second, the role is difficult because the trainer is often in a direct line of authority above the trainee. This legitimates the trainers' power over the staff development situation, but it does little to enhance the true development potential of the program for the trainee. Teachers in these training situations often felt that they were required to accept the information provided in the staff development program with question, becuase they were being "trained" by a

person with authority over their jobs or promotion. This unquestioning acceptance did not necessarily result in the subordinate staff member adopting the content of the staff development, however. Depending upon the situation, some participants were quite resentful of what they viewed as a coercive relationship in the staff development process, and they responded by "tuning out" the content of the program.

The result in these two situation was the same--staff development delivered by central office administrators was often viewed by participants as ineffective.

This review of central administration roles in staff development suggests that when administrators assume the role of *trainers* they must be certain: 1) that the subject matter of the program is in an area that they are knowledgeable about; 2) that their expertise in the subject is accepted by the recipients of the training; and 3) that their power within the school district heirarchy does not appear coercive to staff members.

When the central administration assumes the role of *facilitator* in staff development, administrators appeared to be very concerned with assisting in the program planning activity and providing resources to help staff development programs be implemented. Administrators in these districts maintained resource files of trainers, materials and alternative structures for staff development programs. The facilitator role for central administration was most important in districts with formal needs assessment and high teacher and principal participation in needs assessment and planning.

The *facilitator* role for central administration appears to occur without the potential problems of the *decisionmaker* or *trainer* roles.

In this role, administrators can be supportive of staff development without appearing to "push" one program over another. Even when administrators were the final decisionmakers, the facilitative role was associated with more participation by teachers, principals and others associated with the schools. The adoption of this role sent a message to staff members that staff development was important, but that the district was not going to shove any particular program down their throats. Staff members had more positive attitudes about staff development in districts with a strong emphasis on administrators as facilitators.

Districts with a strong emphasis on central administration as a facilitator of staff development had programs that were regarded positively by participants, with fewer problems or needs for improvement that districts with little emphasis on this role. There was a somewhat larger average number of programs in districts with strongly facilitative administration (an average of 10 programs per district in facilitative districts versus 8.2 programs per district in other districts). The programs in these districts were more likely to be varied in subject matter, presentation style, and trainer selection than districts where the central administration did not take a strong facilitative stance.

Each of the sixteen districts in the study had a different pattern of central administration involvement in staff development. Although 14 of the 16 had central administration that assumed responsibility for decisionmaking in staff development, the amount of decisionmaking control and the way in which it was exercised varied from district to district. All 16 of the districts had used central office administrators as trainers for some of their staff development programs, but the

extent to which other trainers had been used was different in each district. These other trainers included outside consultants and other district personnel, such as teachers, principals, or full-time staff development trainers. All of the districts had central office staff function as facilitators of staff development, but only four districts strongly emphasized this role.

Defining a New Role for Administrators

Although central administrators frequently assumed the three roles described above, they were rarely *participants* in the staff development programs themselves. In all 16 of the districts, the administrators viewed staff development as a necessity for other school employees--primarily teachers--but they apparently did not consider it important for themselves. In fact, administrators seldom attended the entire staff development sessions, except when they were trainers. Only two of the 16 districts had any special staff development for administrative staff

The role of *participant* could have taken several forms. The most obvious is perhaps the special staff development activity for administrators. Only two of the 16 districts had any staff development which was expressly for administrators. None of the districts had special training programs to provide administrators with information on the usefulness of staff development--or its limitations, even though administrators made the majority of decisions about staff development programs. In the district where principals were the key decisionmakers for staff development programs, those principals had no training or assistance from central administration on how staff development might

be used at their schools.

A more common opportunity for the central office administrator to participate in staff development occurs whenever training sessions for other staff take place. In the districts we visited, administrators usually indicated that they were present for part of a training session, or that they did not attend the session because of time pressures. Infrequently, administrators indicated that they had been present at a training session, but only in the role of an observer. For most administrators, participation in staff development seldom occurs, unless they are trainers.

This lack of direct participation by central office administrators perpetuates conditions that are detrimental to effective staff development. First, it encourages administrators to view staff development as remediation, and to believe that only staff members with deficiencies can benefit from it. Second, it allows administrators to absolve themselves of responsibility for what goes on in the classroom.

These two conditions are related. Both assume that teacher change is the primary component of school improvement and that staff development is necessary only for teacher change. To overcome this view, one needs to regard staff development as a necessary component of school improvement instead of as a way to meet teacher deficiencies. When staff development is seen as only one of many tools for school improvement, administrators can begin to recognize clearly what staff development can accomplish--and what it cannot. In order to enhance this recognition, it is necessary for administrators to participate in staff development programs. School administrators who participate in programs will accept move responsibility for school improvement, and

share the responsibility with all those involved with the schools: teachers, principals, community members and administrators. All of the recent literature on educational innovation (e.g., McLaughlin, 1977; Berman and McLaughlin, 1975; Havelock, 1969; Bentzen, 1974) supports this observation. When staff development is confined to teachers alone, it is doomed to piecemeal efforts and to limited effectiveness.

Conclusion

This review of the central administration role in staff development has described the roles of *decisionmaker*, the *trainer*, and the *facilitator* as most typical. Administrators are seldom *participants* in staff development, even though they make most of the decisions about programs, do a great deal of the training themselves, or provide the information and resources for the programs. The fact that administrators do not actively participate in staff development perpetuates the view of staff development as remediation, and divorces the central administration from the process of school improvement. Although the central administration willingly adopted the roles of *decisionmaker*, *trainer* and *facilitator*, administrators doom staff development programs to limited effectiveness because they do not choose to participate actively in them.

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